



Do the Ash‘arīs Negate Allah’s Attributes?

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Question:

There are texts in the Qur’ān and the Sunnah that mention *al-yad*¹, *al-wajh*², *al-‘ayn*³, etc. in relation to Allah. Of course, Ahl al-Sunnah agree that they are not limbs or organs, and that the literal meaning (*ẓāhir*) is rejected and that one knows neither the meaning nor modality (*kayf*). However, I have noticed that some Ash‘arīs say that *al-yad*, *al-‘ayn*, etc. are Attributes [of Allah], whereas other Ash‘arīs refused to say that they were Attributes of Allah. I have a couple of questions concerning this matter:

1) How do we answer those who say that not believing that they are Attributes [of Allah] is a Jahmī stance and accuse the Ash‘arīs of being negators of [Allah’s] Attributes?

2) Amongst those who say that they are Attributes; is there more than one acceptable stance? For example, what is your opinion regarding the following views:

- saying that *al-yad* is an Attribute, that *al-yadain*⁴ and *al-aydī*⁵ are other aspects of this same attribute and not separate attributes on their own.
- saying that *al-yad* is an attribute, that *al-yadain* is a separate attribute, and that *al-aydī* is a separate attribute.

¹ Literal translation: Hand

² Literal translation: Face

³ Literal translation: Eye

⁴ Literal translation: Two Hands

⁵ Literal translation: Hands (plural)

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- saying that *al-yadain* are two distinct attributes.
- saying that *al-yad*, *al-yadain*, and *al-aydi* are not really attributes on their own but are metaphorical references to real Attributes of Allah.
- not giving a verdict, and instead saying: “Perhaps *al-yad* is an Attribute [of Allah], or perhaps it is not an Attribute, Allah knows best.”

Amongst these stances, which are acceptable and which are not? I make clear again that in all these stances, one understands by ‘Attribute’ something different from the literal meaning of a ‘limb’.

Reply:

If the meaning intended [by Allah] for *al-yad* is Power (*qudrah*) and Favour (*ni‘ma*) then it is an Attribute [of Allah] without any doubt in this sense. And if the meaning is something else which is neither Power nor Favour, then there is a difference of opinion amongst the Sunnis.

Amongst them are those who recognize and affirm an attribute called ‘*al-yad*’ by which Allah created Ādam, that is neither Power nor Favour, but is an independent (*mustaqilla*) attribute; and there are others who do not see a difference in this sense between ‘*al-yad*’ and Will (*irada*) or Power (*qudrah*), and thus they do not recognize and do not affirm that it is an independent attribute [of Allah], but regard *al-yad* as one of the synonyms of Power (*qudrah*) or Favour (*ni‘ma*) according to the context (in which it is found).

Once one rejects that the meaning can be that of limbs and parts, and [one rejects] modality, what remains is subject to independent scholarly reasoning (*ijtihād*) because there are no decisive texts on this matter. Thus, the difference of opinion in this matter is not harmful. However, to multiply the Attributes is weaker as a position because it implies affirmation of a distinction (*thubūt at-taghayur*) and that is difficult here since there is no decisive evidence but rather these are texts that are conjectural (*ẓannīyah*) or whose meaning is metaphorical if they are even authentic. For example, there is no text which mentions three hands yet some texts indicate that there are *yadain* and others mention that *al-yadain* are both right sided. So, it is a field of *ijtihād* and, [for example], what is mentioned in ‘*al-Ibana*’ (if we concede its authenticity as a whole), that *al-yad* should be interpreted as the two attributes *yadain*, this is a matter of *ijtihād* that is not settled upon in a decisive way. The same applies to *al-wajh* and *al-‘ayn*.

Concerning the (false) charge from the Wahhābī Ḥashawīs against the people of the Sunnah of *ta'tīl* (negation of Allah's Attributes), we turn this back against them. We say that we find you differing between yourselves in the affirmation of some 'Attributes', such as the Attribute of 'dwelling place', the Attribute of 'image', 'arm', 'silence', 'laying down', 'running', 'youth', 'beardlessness', 'golden sandals', 'the blanket on the face', 'placing one leg on top of the other', 'sitting', 'movement from up to down', etc. Regarding all of these 'Attributes' and others, we found that you differ between yourselves about them – some amongst you affirm them while others deny them and yet, in spite of this, you did not accuse each other of being astray! So, for what reason did you not declare each other astray on these matters? And why is it that those who affirm these Attributes don't deserve to be accused of anthropomorphism? And those who denied these Attributes – why don't they deserve to be accused of *ta'tīl* (negation)? Their answer to this question is our response to the charge they raised against us.

